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NAHDLATUL ULAMA AND THE KILLINGS OF 1965–66: RELIGION, POLITICS, AND REMEMBRANCE

Greg Fealy and Katharine McGregor¹

In early 2000, President Abdurrahman Wahid declared that he wanted to rectify what he saw as the harsh and unjust treatment of communists in Indonesia. He apologized for the mass slaughter of communists in the months following the failed coup attempt of 30 September 1965, and he called for an investigation into those killings. He acknowledged that the organization he had once led, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, The Revival of the Islamic Scholars), had been heavily involved in the killings, but he said that this would not deter him from seeking the truth. He also proposed that the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly Decision no. 25 of 1966 (TAP MPRS 25/1966) that banned the Communist Party of Indonesia (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) be rescinded.² His proposals sparked an immediate outcry from a range of Muslim and anti-communist groups, but the sharpest criticism came from within NU. Senior NU figures denounced Abdurrahman's plans as dangerous, in that they would pave the way for a communist revival and also rekindle memories of past conflict that could result in new tensions within society.³ Some NU leaders expressed pride in their organization's role in the killings and the elimination of the PKI, while others downplayed NU's involvement, claiming that the army had committed most of the

¹ Katharine McGregor's research was supported under the Australian Research Council's Discovery Project (Project no DP0772760). The authors thank *Indonesia's* anonymous reviewer for the helpful feedback.

² "Terhadap Korban G30S/PKI Gus Dur: Sejak Dulu Sudah Minta Maaf," *Kompas*, March 15, 2000.

³ See Yusuf Hasyim, "Kenapa kita menentang komunisme?," *Republika*, April 29, 2000.

executions. Perhaps taken aback at the reaction, the president made no further statements on the matter and TAP MPRS 25/1966 was allowed to remain in effect. While discussion of Abdurrahman's proposal raged for several weeks, ultimately the topic was supplanted in the media by new controversies swirling around the Abdurrahman government.

This brief flare-up at the turn of the century of the debate about NU's role in the 1965–66 killings was the only time since the mid-1960s that the "killings" issue commanded widespread attention in the mainstream media and public discourse. That the issue should so quickly have subsided says much about its sensitive nature (i.e., people are unwilling to discuss it), particularly within NU circles. NU leaders and writers are circumspect about how they refer to these events. On the one hand, they regularly mention the achievements of NU's youth wing, Ansor, in "safeguarding" the Muslim community from the communist threat. NU books and exhibitions often include photos of Ansor members undergoing paramilitary training or staging anti-communist parades with marching bands and large banners (albeit these publications seldom mention any details of the killings and the precise role that NU units played).⁴ On the other hand, several NU-based non-government organizations have quietly conducted reconciliation programs over the past decade between small numbers of NU members and former communists, with varying degrees of success. Such initiatives have incurred the wrath of senior NU officials, who warn the NGOs that the topic is best left alone. Indeed, the only eminent NU leader who has been willing, over many years, to criticize openly NU's role in the bloodshed is Abdurrahman Wahid, though his detractors point out that he had the luxury of being overseas when the violence took place.

The NU is frequently identified in the literature on the 1965 killings as playing a key role,⁵ but opinions are divided regarding the extent to which they were pushed by the military into participating in the violence.⁶ In recent years, members of the NU have claimed that they were incited and directed by the military. In this paper, we explore two main issues. The first is historical: what was the role of NU during the killings? This raises a number of subsidiary questions. How much knowledge of and control over the killings did the NU central leadership have? Did the army push NU into slaughtering communists, or was NU a willing and active participant? What roles did the *ulama* (Muslim scholars) play in this process? Through a close analysis of NU documents, interviews, and NU branch communiqués, this essay probes and measures

⁴ See, for example, the displays in the Nahdlatul Ulama Museum in Surabaya, which include photos of NU mass meetings following the 30 September coup and of Banser (paramilitary corps) men gathered together in small groups ready for action. See also Soeleiman Fadeli and Mohammad Subhan, *Antologi NU: Sejarah, Istilah, Amaliah dan Uswah* (Surabaya: Khalista and LTN NU, 2007).

⁵ Robert Cribb, *The Indonesian Killings 1965–66: Studies from Java and Bali* (Clayton: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1990), p. 26.

⁶ Sulistyono argues, for example, that in Kediri there was close cooperation between the military and NU, whereas in Jombang the military's role was less clear and the role of NU was more prominent. Sudjatmiko argues that in Central Java, due to the shortage of army units, the military armed and trained members of Banser and other vigilante groups who then carried out the killings. He believes that in Kediri and Jember, NU played a dominant role in anti-PKI actions. See Hermawan Sulistyono, "The Forgotten Years: The Missing History of Indonesia's Mass Slaughters, Jombang–Kediri 1965–1966" (PhD dissertation, Arizona State University, 1997); and Iwan Gardono Sudjatmiko, "The Destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI): A Comparative Analysis of East Java and Bali" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 1992).

the extent of institutional support within the Nadhlatul Ulama leadership for the anti-communist killings. Second, we examine the more recent legacy of the killings for the NU community. In particular, we consider the range of discourses within NU and look at the role of NGOs and activists linked to NU who are involved in reconciliation and rehabilitation efforts. This section of the paper draws on interviews and newspaper commentary from members of NU during the period 1998–2009, after the demise of the Suharto regime, during which there has been heightened attention to human-rights abuses and an initiative to open and explore this past.⁷

NU–Communist Party Relations

Martin van Bruinessen has written that “the deepest cultural and political divide in Indonesian society, and the one invested with the most emotion and mistrust, is that between Islam and Communism.”⁸ NU, like most other Islamic organizations, has a long history of antipathy towards communists. Since its founding in 1926, NU leaders have consistently spoken out against communism, denouncing its doctrine as atheistic and its ideals of collective ownership of wealth and property as anathema to Islamic teachings.⁹ But NU’s anti-communism, until the late 1940s, was less intense than that of their modernist co-religionists in organizations such as Muhammadiyah and Persis. Modernists tended to be worldlier and better informed than NU traditionalists about the nature of communist regimes in Europe and Asia, and modernist journals gave much space to discussing and repudiating Marxism and other communist doctrines.¹⁰ By contrast, NU’s preoccupation was more concerned with intra-Islamic community dynamics, particularly relations with its modernist rivals, than with any ideological condemnation of communism.

This posture changed dramatically during the revolutionary period (1945–49), when NU *ulama* came to view communists as not only a political, but also a direct physical, threat to traditionalist Muslims. Tensions between leftist parties and Masyumi, the main Islamic party of which NU was a major component, as well as growing mutual suspicion between communist and devout Muslim soldiers and militia members, created a volatile situation. This climaxed in September 1948 with the Madiun Affair, in which PKI-affiliated forces attempted to take over the local government. During the uprising, PKI fighters killed tens, and possibly hundreds, of

⁷ These interviews (2007–09) were conducted by Kate McGregor and Vanessa Hearman as part of a larger research project on Islam and the politics of memory in post-authoritarian Indonesia, funded by the Australian Research Council’s Discovery Project scheme. All of the interviews cited in this article from the early 1990s were conducted by Greg Fealy unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Martin van Bruinessen, “Post-Soeharto Muslim Engagements with Civil Society and Democratization,” in *Indonesia in Transition: Rethinking “Civil Society,” “Region,” and “Crisis,”* ed. Samuel Hanneman and Henk Schulte Nordholt (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), p. 55.

⁹ Not all *ulama* were antipathetic to communism. In the early 1920s, Haji Misbach, a leading modernist preacher in Solo, rose to prominence in leftist circles with his teachings about the compatibility of Islam and communism. Though few other *ulama* had shared Misbach’s close identification with communism, numerous other *ulama* were sympathetic to some aspects of socialism. See Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912–1926* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 127–38.

¹⁰ Traditionalist Muslims are those who follow one of the four medieval law schools and who tend to be culturally inclusive. Modernists are those who base their practice of Islam on the Qur’an and Prophetic example, rather than on the law schools. Most traditionalists in Indonesia identify with NU. The main modernist organizations are Muhammadiyah and Persatuan Islam.

Masyumi leaders and supporters, including NU members, before the Republican Army crushed the rebellion. From this time on, NU regarded the PKI as an inherent enemy. There were also ongoing efforts to keep the memories of these Madiun reprisals alive. In 1950, for example, a Masyumi-linked organization called repeatedly for September 18, the day of the Madiun revolt, to be declared a National Day of Mourning for the "Islamic martyrs" who died on that day.¹¹ NU and military-sponsored texts regularly referred to the "slaughter" or "massacre" of "hundreds" of NU members by communists at Madiun, though this characterization of the event is very likely exaggerated, and made no mention of Masyumi aggression against PKI fighters, which appears also to have been significant.¹²

During the 1950s, NU maintained a consistently oppositional attitude toward the PKI. It resisted President Sukarno's attempts in 1953 and 1956 to elevate PKI cadre and communist sympathizers to cabinet posts, and also campaigned against leftist appointments to senior military and bureaucratic positions. The changing political dynamics and growing electoral power of the PKI from the mid-1950s created a dilemma for NU.¹³ While the PKI was rising in strength, support for NU and other parties was falling. As Sukarno, with the backing of the army and the PKI, began dismantling parliamentary democracy and erecting a semi-authoritarian system, NU's leadership was divided on whether to join the new Guided Democracy regime or oppose it. A major objection of those who opposed Guided Democracy was the presence of PKI members in the government. Eventually, NU adopted a policy of accommodation and participated in all the cabinets and institutions of Guided Democracy. One of the rationales for participation was that it would allow NU to counteract directly PKI influence within the government and the bureaucracy. Those favoring accommodation argued that if NU were not part of Guided Democracy, then it would be in a weak position to defend its constituency.¹⁴

Relations between NU and the PKI continued to deteriorate throughout the early 1960s, despite both parties being required to maintain an outward appearance of cooperation within the regime. The growing presence and assertiveness of the PKI in NU strongholds in East and Central Java aroused particular concern. When the PKI launched its unilateral action (*aksi sepihak*) campaign in late 1963 to seize "excess" farm land, frequently targeting large landholdings controlled by *ulama* or their supporters,

¹¹ "Pemberontakan Kaum Madiun," *Pedoman*, September 7, 1954, p. 1; "Buku Putih PKI," *Pedoman*, September 18, 1953, p. 1; "Kedjadian Madiun: Sedjarah Pemberontakan PKI," *Keng Po*, September 18, 1954, p. 2; "Masyumi Surabaya," *Pedoman*, September 24, 1953, p. 1. For more on the debates about Madiun between the PKI and Masyumi in the 1950s, see Katharine McGregor, "A Reassessment of the Significance of the 1948 Madiun Uprising to the Cold War in Indonesia," *Kajian Malaysia*, vol. xxvi, 1 (2009).

¹² Ann Swift, *The Road to Madiun: The Indonesian Communist Uprising of 1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1989), footnotes 130 and 138 on pp. 76 and 78; and Tim Penyusun Jawa Pos, *Lubang-Lubang Pembantaian Petualangan PKI di Madiun* (Jakarta: Grafiti, 1990). George Kahin estimated the number of dead Masyumi members at several hundred, but he admits in the second edition of his book that he relied strongly on Masyumi sources, so there is still reason for some scepticism concerning this figure. George Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 300.

¹³ PKI gained 16 percent of the votes in the 1955 elections to become the fourth largest party, and averaged 27 percent in the local elections of 1957–58, indicating that it was now the most popular party.

¹⁴ Greg Fealy, "Wahab Chasbullah, Traditionalism and the Political Development of Nahdlatul Ulama," in *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia*, ed. Greg Barton and Greg Fealy (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1996), pp. 1–41.

clashes between PKI and NU supporters quickly broke out. In most cases, NU groups succeeded in driving off communist groups from NU land, but the depth of animus had, by early 1965, reached dangerous levels.

The Rise of the NU Militants

The growing power of the PKI during the early 1960s deepened the cleavages within NU's leadership and led to the emergence of two broad groups: the accommodationists, who pursued a pragmatic policy towards Guided Democracy and the PKI; and the militants, who were fervently anti-communist. Prominent accommodationists included the party's *rais am* (president), Wahab Chasbullah; its chairman, Idham Chalid; and central board members, such as Saifuddin Zuhri and Masykur. Many of the militants were either former army officers or had developed close links to anti-PKI military officers. Chief among them were Yusuf Hasyim, a tough ex-infantry officer and chairman of NU's young men's wing, Ansor; Bisri Syamsuri, the deputy *rais am*; Hamid Baidowi, a retired military intelligence officer and businessman; Munasir Ali, a former army major and secretary-general of the national Veterans' League (Legiun Veteran); and younger NU leaders, such as Chalid Mawardi, a journalist and Ansor secretary-general; as well as the dashing entrepreneur and NU deputy chairman, Subchan Z. E. From the early 1960s, all had worked with anti-communist officers, politicians, and community groups in organizing against the PKI.

The militants were intent on preparing NU for confrontation with the communists and sought to mobilize its mass organizations such as Ansor, Sarbumusi (Muslim Indonesian Workers Union), Lesbumi (Muslim Indonesian Cultural Institute), Muslimat NU (NU women's branch), Pertanu (NU Peasants' Association), and PMII (NU's tertiary student body) to counter corresponding PKI affiliates such as Pemuda Rakyat (the People's Youth), SOBSI (Indonesian Central Labor Organization), LEKRA (The People's Cultural Institute), Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement), CGMNI (The General Committee of Tertiary Students) and the BTI (Indonesian Peasant's Front).¹⁵ The NU systematically built up anti-PKI networks at the local level, particularly in East and Central Java, drawing heavily on cadre from Ansor and Ikapebi (Ikatan Bekas Pejuang Islam, or Association of Muslim Ex-Fighters), an NU's veterans' organization.

The militants also ensured that anti-communist NU cadre participated in the new organizations formed under the aegis of Guided Democracy. Chief among them were the Badan Kerja Sama (BKS; Cooperation Bodies), organizations designed to improve relations between the army and various non-communist political and functional

¹⁵ Several of the organizations listed above are acronyms. Sarbumusi: Sarekat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia, or Union of Indonesian Muslim Workers. Lesbumi: Lembaga Seniman-Budayawan Muslimin Indonesia, or Institute of Indonesian Muslim Artists and Cultural Practitioners. Pertanu: Pertanian Nahdlatul Ulama, or Nahdlatul Ulama Farming Association. PMII: Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia, or Indonesian Muslim Students Movement. SOBSI: Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia, or All Indonesian Workers' Organization Center. LEKRA is Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, or People's Cultural Institute. Gerwani is Gerakan Wanita Indonesia, or Indonesian Women's Movement. CGMNI: Komite General Mahasiswa Nasional Indonesia, or Indonesian Tertiary Students' General Committee. BTI: Barisan Tani Indonesia, or Indonesian Peasants' Front. On NU forming these organizations, see Slamet Effendy Yusuf, Mohamad Ichwan Syam, and Masdar Farid Mas'udi, *Dinamika Kaum Santri: Menelusuri Jejak and Pergolakan Internal NU* (Jakarta: C. V. Rajawali, 1983), p. 48.

groups.¹⁶ From 1960, Sukarno incorporated the Cooperation Bodies into the National Front and required greater PKI participation. Involvement in these groups offered participants training, facilities, contact with non-communist officers, and the opportunity to “shadow” PKI activities.

The most important initiative of the militants in confronting the PKI was the formation of Banser (Barisan Ansor Serba Guna, Ansor Multi-Purpose Brigade), a paramilitary corps within Ansor. Founded in 1962, its official purpose was to provide physical protection for party activities and supporters, but its unstated aim was to protect the NU community from attack by the PKI. Yusuf Hasyim, who featured prominently in Banser’s early development, claimed the inspiration for Banser came from studying Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, in which Hitler detailed the need to develop a power base through the Nazi party to counter a threat.¹⁷ Initially, Banser membership was restricted to long-time Ansor members or trusted *santri* (devout Muslims) from *pesantren* in NU strongholds. Members received physical training, which included traditional martial arts, such as *pencak silat*.¹⁸ Banser members frequently recount the arduous, often punishing nature of this training, with trainees regularly suffering severe bruising, flesh wounds, and even broken bones. Ansor members with military experience dating back to the independence struggle were the favored appointees as either the heads or advisors of local Banser units.¹⁹ Banser soon became a formidable force within NU, with well-trained and highly disciplined members who were militantly anti-communist. *Aksi sepihak* provided the first test of Banser’s paramilitary capacity and, in many areas, Banser units formed the front line in defending land owned by NU members and supporters. In most clashes, Banser members were usually able to resist communist groups and often succeeded in putting them to flight. Banser soon gained a reputation for unflinching physical opposition to communism, a point noted by anti-PKI army officers, and NU militants became confident about their ability to confront and defeat the PKI.²⁰

The 30 September Movement

Throughout August and September, NU, like other parties and Islamic organizations, was awash with rumors and speculation about a possible coup, and many had prepared contingency plans. As soon as news of the coup attempt spread, NU leaders and activists gathered at two sites: the house of the late Wahid Hasyim, the son of NU’s founder and former minister, in Matraman, and Subchan’s luxury house in

¹⁶ Herbert Feith, *Dynamics of Guided Democracy, in Indonesia*, ed. Ruth McVey (New Haven, CT: Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, by arrangement with HRAF Press, 1963), p. 335.

¹⁷ The name “Banser” was inspired by the name for the Hitler Youth, Panzer Divisions. See Yusuf Hasyim, “Killing Communists,” in *Indonesia in the Suharto Years: Issues, Incidents, and Images*, 2nd edition, ed. John McGlynn et al. (Jakarta: Lontar and KITLV Press, 2007).

¹⁸ Hairus Salim, *Kelompok Paramiliter NU* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004), p. 7.

¹⁹ Andrée Feillard, *NU vis a via Negara: pencarian Isi, Bentuk dan Makna* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 1999), pp. 65–66.

²⁰ Margo Lyons, *Bases of Conflict in Rural Java* (Berkeley, CA: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1970); and Greg Fealy, *Ijtihad Politik Ulama: Sejarah NU 1952–1967* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2003), pp. 318–25.

Jalan Banyumas, Menteng, both in Central Jakarta.²¹ The Matraman group was the more important of the two as it contained numerous members of NU's leadership, particularly from the militant faction, and it became the nerve center of NU's responses during early October. For many years, the Hasyim house had been one of the gathering places in Jakarta for NU's elite, especially those hailing from the big *kiai* (Islamic scholar) clans of the Jombang region in East Java. The Banyumas house attracted a young, diverse assortment of cadre, including many NU student and youth leaders, as well as Catholic and non-communist nationalists who were personally close to Subchan.

The NU militants were convinced that the coup involved the PKI. For months, Indonesia had been gripped by speculation and tension over President Sukarno's declining health and the prospect that, if he fell seriously ill or died, the rival communist and anti-communist forces would engage in open conflict. Rumors that the PKI had smuggled Chinese weapons into Indonesia and was secretly arming and training its own militia added to the sense of impending crisis. One of the NU militants at Matraman recalled: "We knew immediately that this was the work of the PKI. No one disagreed about this."²² They resolved on three responses to the situation: (1) to deploy trusted NU cadre to move inconspicuously about Jakarta and report back on coup events, especially the control of key sites and facilities by the plotters; (2) to quickly establish contact with anti-communist army officers to prepare for both defensive action and possible retaliation against the PKI; and (3) to open lines of emergency communication with NU branches to ensure that reactions against the coup were coordinated and did not heighten the risk to NU members.²³

Reports from NU cadre soon established that only a few sections of the city were under the control of those involved in the coup and that there seemed to be no mass mobilization of the PKI or attacks on NU leaders or assets. By mid-evening of October 1, NU leaders at Matraman and Banyumas felt certain that the coup attempt was crumbling. NU scouts informed their leaders that in central Freedom Square (Medan Merdeka), troops allied to the 30 September Movement had dispersed, and soldiers loyal to interim army commander and well-known anti-communist Major-General Suharto now controlled the strategic sites in the capital. Suharto's national radio broadcast at 9:00 PM was further proof that the coup was effectively over. NU leaders, now less fearful of communist retaliation, began discussing how the failed coup may have provided the long-awaited opportunity to crush the PKI. Before acting, though, they needed evidence of PKI involvement in the 30 September Movement, as well as the army's approval for moving against the communists.

The first high-level contact with military officers took place late on October 1, when Subchan contacted a number of Suharto allies, including Major General Umar Wirahadikusumah, the Jakarta commander, and Brigadier General Sutjipto, the head of the political section of KOTI (Komando Operasi Tertinggi, Supreme Operations Command). He was informed of the kidnapping of the generals and communist

²¹ The Wahid Hasyim house, at Jalan Taman Amir Hamzah no. 8, is now the office of the Wahid Institute. Until the late 1990s, it remained largely as it was in the 1950s and 1960s, a rare example of living history within NU.

²² Interview with Abdulhaq Idris, Jakarta, May 3, 1992.

²³ Interviews with Munasir, Jakarta, September 14, 1991, and Said Budairy, Jakarta, September 30, 1991.

complicity in the coup, and was asked to help defeat the 30 September Movement. Umar provided handguns to Subchan for personal protection in case of a PKI attack.²⁴ (Other NU leaders would later get guns and money from various army officers to facilitate the mobilizing of NU members.) Further meetings with army officers over the next few days gave impetus to NU's anti-PKI campaign. At a meeting with Subchan and other party leaders at the KOTI headquarters on October 2, Sutjipto gave details of the involvement of sections of the PKI leadership, as well as its youth and women's wings, in the coup movement and called on those in attendance to organize civilian support for the army. Later that day, Subchan and a number of Catholic student-group leaders, with the tacit backing of army headquarters, formed KAP-Gestapu (Kesatuan Aksi Pengganyangan Gestapu; Action Front to Crush the 30 September Movement).²⁵ This was the first "action front" to oppose the PKI, and it played a pivotal role over the following months in mobilizing anti-communist student and youth groups. Subchan became its chairman, and Yusuf Hasyim joined the presidium.

On October 3, Munasir met General Nasution, who was recovering in the hospital after being injured in the coup attempt, and gained his approval for the launch of a forceful NU response against the PKI. Other NU leaders attended a further KOTI briefing at which a tape recording was played of confessions made by several participants in the coup. It directly implicated the PKI in the 30 September Movement.²⁶ By this stage, the army was aware from events in Jakarta and Central Java that sections of the military were also implicated in the 30 September Movement. Although a small number of PKI members or supporters were also NU members,²⁷ anti-communist officers encouraged an alliance with the NU because they felt the NU was less at risk of PKI infiltration than its own troops.

NU leaders, and especially the militant-dominated group at Matraman, saw these meetings as clearing the way for the PKI's destruction. They believed there was now "sufficient" evidence of PKI participation in the coup to justify extreme counter-measures,²⁸ and the army command was urging civilian action. They responded by forming the Badan Koordinasi Keamanan Jamiah Nahdlatul Ulama (BKKJNU; NU Organization Security Coordinating Body) on October 3, under the chairmanship of

²⁴ Interviews with Eki Syachruddin, Jakarta, March 13, 1992, and June 18, 1996; and with Harry Tjan Silalahi, Jakarta, May 12, 1992. Also: Subchan, interviewed by Harold Crouch, Jakarta, April 16, 1970. See also A. H. Nasution, *Memenuhi Panggilan Tugas*, vol. 6 (Jakarta: CV Haji Mas Agung, 1988), p. 273; and Sundhaussen, *Road to Power: Indonesian Military Politics, 1945–1967* (Kuala Lumpur and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 210–11.

²⁵ Interviews with Harry Tjan Silalahi, Jakarta, May 12, 1992; Eki Syachruddin, Jakarta, March 13, 1992; and Subchan, interviewed by Harold Crouch, Jakarta, April 16, 1970. Also Sundhaussen, *Road to Power*, p. 211; and Harold Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 141.

²⁶ Interviews with Achmad Sjaichu, Depok, August 26, 1991; and Said Budairi, Jakarta, August 30, 1991.

²⁷ For more on this, see these autobiographies: Hasan Raid, *Pergulatan Muslim Komunis: Otobiografi Hasan Raid* (Yogyakarta: LKPSM and Syarikat, 2001); and Achmadi Moestahal, *Dari Gontor ke Pulau Buru: Memoar H. Achmadi Moestahal* (Yogyakarta: Syarikat, 2002).

²⁸ The "evidence," in fact, only implicated small sections of the PKI leadership and a number of affiliates, such as Pemuda Rakyat and Gerwani; there was little to suggest that other sections of the party had foreknowledge of or involvement in the coup. For more on this, see John Roosa, *Pretext for Mass Murder* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006). For NU's purposes, however, this was enough to justify a pogrom against the PKI.

Munasir.²⁹ Its main purpose was to plan and coordinate NU's campaign against the PKI. The prospect of violence, and PBNU's desire to control this, was apparent in instructions to Ansor branches on October 3. Those instructions warned:

For further steps in eliminating [*menumpas*] "30 SEPTEMBER MOVEMENT" and its henchmen ... wait for and only implement instructions from the Leaders of "NU Community Coordination" [i.e., BKKJNU] which has been formed by PBNU [the NU Central Board].³⁰

Although the BKKJNU statement was made in the name of PBNU, it was largely the initiative of militants, who seem not to have consulted with either Idham Chalid or Wahab Chasbullah. Idham had gone into hiding when the coup was staged, and his whereabouts remained unknown to Matraman for almost a week, and Wahab was in Jombang and difficult to contact. But even if Idham and Wahab had been present, they would have been powerless to halt the militants. Many members of PBNU, who had previously been reluctant to move against the PKI, were now fully supportive of emphatic action. Moreover, the militants were determined to seize the moment and, as Yusuf Hasyim admitted, "cajoling and deceit" were necessary to get things done. More than a few official PBNU statements from this period contained forged signatures of Idham and other PBNU leaders.³¹

The next day, the militants took an even bolder step: they decided that NU would publicly link the PKI to the 30 September Movement and call for the party to be banned. Neither the army nor any party had openly implicated the PKI in the coup. The NU militants drafted a resolution calling upon President Sukarno:

To dissolve [*membubarkan*] as soon as possible the Indonesian Communist Party, Pemuda Rakyat, Gerwani, the Public Works' Laborers' Union/SOBSI, as well as all other social organizations which participated in masterminding [*mendalangi*] and/or working together with those who have named themselves the "30 September Movement."³²

On the evening of October 5, Subchan led an NU delegation to the army's media-operations center and asked that the resolution be broadcast on Radio Republic Indonesia. After gaining Suharto's approval, the army allowed the resolution to be broadcast nationally.³³ It was also carried in many of the newspapers that were published the next morning. The militants were jubilant that NU had become the PKI's first public accuser.

²⁹ PBNU, "Surat Keputusan," 3302/Tanf/B/X-'65, October 3, 1965, AN 182. Idham Chalid was BKKJNU's nominal leader, but effective authority was exercised by Munasir and the three "affairs coordinators" (*koordinator urusan*), Dachlan, Subchan, and Sjaichu.

³⁰ PP GP Ansor, "Instruksi" (Instructions), 1st/02/PP/1965, October 3, 1965, AN 172.

³¹ Interviews with Yusuf Hasyim, Jombang, October 26, 1992; and Hamid Baidowi, Jakarta, August 5, 1991.

³² PBNU, "Pernyataan Pengurus Besar Partai 'Nahdlatul Ulama' Beserta Segenap Ormas-Ormasnja" (Statement of the Nahdlatul Ulama Party Executive Board as well as All its Social Organizations), October 5, 1965, Pamphlet Collection, Monash ASRL.

³³ Interviews with Chalid Mawardi, Jakarta, August 14, 1991; Munasir, Mojokerto, October 14, 1991; Said Budairy, Jakarta, August 30, 1991; Jusuf Hasyim, Jombang, October 26, 1991; and Hamid Baidlowi, Jakarta, April 26, 1992.

Following the release of the resolution, BKKJNU sent couriers to NU branches to give oral briefings on coup-related events, including “evidence” of PKI complicity and the army’s tacit endorsement of anti-PKI actions. Branch leaders were urged to prepare for mobilizing their members against the Communist Party, but were also warned to cooperate closely with reliable non-communist officers and other PKI opponents.³⁴ PBNU’s major concern was that local members would act precipitately, thereby inviting retaliation from the army, police, or communists.³⁵

There can be little doubt that party leaders were preparing NU members for mass violence against the PKI. PBNU leaders were aware of members’ intense hatred of communists, which had built up at branch levels inside their organization, and knew that little encouragement was needed to unleash a *santri* offensive. Written instructions to branches, although avoiding explicit mention of violent acts such as killing (*pembunuhan*) or slaughter (*pembantaian*), made frequent reference to *menumpas* (to eradicate, destroy, annihilate), *membersihkan* (to clean up), *menghabiskan* (finish off), *mengganyang* (to crush, smash, gobble), and *mengikis habis* (eliminate). While it can be argued that such terms referred only to the political or ideological destruction of the PKI, for the fervently anti-communist members of NU they were an exhortation to eliminate physically all traces of communism. Evidence of NU’s direct endorsement of the violence can be found in some NU communiqués, such as correspondence from PBNU to the Pekalongan branch of Ansor, thanking the branch for their report on efforts to crush the 30 September Movement.³⁶ NU leaders also urged that if any NU men became victims of abduction or were “killed in the battle,” a report should be filed with their name, address, position in the organization, family details, and an explanation of how they died, such that appropriate merit would be bestowed upon each victim as a *syahid* (Islamic martyr).³⁷ There are few sources on the number of Banser members who died in the violence of 1965–66, perhaps because the total number is small.³⁸

PBNU also drew parallels between the Madiun Incident of 1948 and the 30 September affair. In a circular to all branches on October 9, it described the Communist Party in these damning terms:

³⁴ Confidential interviews conducted by Greg Fealy during late 1991 and early 1992 in Gresik, Surabaya, Kediri, and Jakarta.

³⁵ The perils of premature action were apparent on October 13 when five Ansor members were shot dead by policemen in Bangil, East Java, during a violent demonstration. Crouch, “The Indonesian Army in Politics: 1960–1971” (PhD dissertation, Monash University, 1975), p. 263.

³⁶ Ansor Tjabang Kopra Pekalongan, Putjuk pimpinan gerakan Ansor, surat kepada pimpinan gerakan pemuda, NU Archives, Arsip Nasional, File No. 117, December 1, 1965.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sunyoto claims that 155 Banser members died in Banyuwangi between October 17–22, 1965, after being deceived by members of the PKI. He also claims two *santri*, one of whom was a Banser member, were killed on October 13, 1965, by PKI (in the Kediri area). See Agus Sunyoto, *Banser Berjihad Menumpas PKI* (Tulungagung: Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan, PW.GP. Ansor Jawa Timur & Pesulukan Thoriqoh Agung, 1996), pp. 113, 119–24, 136. In his history of Ansor, Choirul Anam also records the numbers of Ansor men who had fallen as they were reported at an Ansor meeting in Jember in February 1969. He lists six deaths in Malang, seven in Probolinggo, five in Lumajang, seventy-two in Blambangan (453 injured), eleven in Tuban, and twenty-two in Surabaya. See Choirul Anam, *Gerak Langkah Pemuda Ansor: Sebuah Percikan Sejarah Kelahiran* (Surabaya: Majalah Nahdlatul Ulama AULA, 1990), p. 93. These numbers are all very small compared to the number of PKI and PKI-affiliated persons who died.

The reckless adventure [*petualangan*] of the counter-revolutionary “30 September Movement,” which was master-minded by the communists ... reminds us of the reckless adventure which they undertook on 18 September 1948 in Madiun, and once again proves the brutality [*kekedjaman*] and barbaric nature [*kebiadaban*] of atheists whenever they carry out their terror.³⁹

The language of this 1965 circular could only have reinforced impressions among the party’s grassroots members of the grave threat posed by communism and of the need for emphatic action to prevent *santri* from again becoming the victims of PKI aggression.

In party meetings and in discussions with army officers immediately after October 1, militants began planning for wholesale violence against PKI members.⁴⁰ The hardening of attitudes was apparent on October 8 when Ansor activists, with assurances of immunity from army intervention, attacked the PKI headquarters in central Jakarta. Shortly afterwards, the buildings of other communist organizations and institutions were attacked, as were the houses of PKI leaders.⁴¹ NU’s accommodationists, led by Idham and Wahab, allowed the violence to escalate. While they had been willing to cooperate with the PKI as part of their involvement in Sukarno’s Guided Democracy regime, they distrusted the communists and were not opposed in principle to the PKI being routed or banned. But, pragmatic as always, the accommodationists worried about how NU might fare in any change of the political constellation, particularly if the destruction of the PKI weakened Sukarno’s position. Their main concern was securing NU’s continued presence in the government.

The Outbreak of Violence

Most of the violence against the PKI and members of affiliated organizations occurred in rural areas and regional cities of Indonesia. NU leaders at both the national and local levels endorsed the use of violence, sometimes openly, but more often, tacitly. Many NU branches also sent expressions of support to PBNU in Jakarta, particularly after the October 5 broadcast condemning the PKI.⁴² Detailed preparations for killing communists were usually carried out at the local level, and were overseen by NU leaders and *ulama* from the area.

³⁹ PBNU, “Instruksi,” October 9, 1965, AN 172.

⁴⁰ Confidential interviews.

⁴¹ *Kompas*, October 9, 1965; Crouch, *Army and Politics*, p. 141; A. H. Nasution, *Memenuhi*, p. 277; and confidential interviews.

⁴² Pengurus Tjbang Partai Nahdlatul Ulama, Kabupaten Labuhanbatu, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 115; Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Tjbang Kora Tandjungkarang, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 182; Pengurus Tjbang Partai Nahdlatul Ulama Pendope Talang Ubi, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 110; Pengurus Nahdlatul Ulama, Tjbang Komerling Ulu di Belitang (Sumatera Selatan), Arsip Nasional NU File No. 115; Pengurus Wilayah Partai Nahdlatul SUMBAR, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 182; Pimpinan Sjuritjah Partai N.U Tjbang Surabaya, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 182; Pernyataan Bersama Partai Nahdlatul Ulama, Tjbang Bangil Dengan Seluruh Ormasnya, NU File No. 182; Pengurus Wilayah Partai Nahdlatul Ulama Kalimantan Barat, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 116; Pengurus Wilayah Partai Nahdlatul Maluku, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 117; and Badan Kordinasi Keamanan Djamah Nahdlatul Ulama, Dati Lampung, Arsip Nasional NU File No. 115.

Large-scale violence involving NU members began in mid-October. At a meeting of East Java Ansor leaders on or about October 10, plans were drawn up, with the army's approval, for a series of mass rallies on October 13 in cities across the province. These were to be followed by attacks on PKI buildings and the killing of party supporters.⁴³ The best-documented instance of events surrounding these rallies occurred in Kediri. After a large rally of anti-communist organizations, a section of the crowd, including local Banser units, descended on the PKI office and killed eleven party members as they tried to defend the building. The roundup of PKI members and suspected sympathizers began soon afterwards.⁴⁴

Similar events were occurring in other parts of the province. For example, there were violent clashes between NU and PKI groups in the Banyuwangi region on October 18, the same day that a mass grave containing the bodies of thirty-five PKI supporters was discovered. Several thousand PKI members (and suspected sympathizers) lost their lives over the next few days.⁴⁵ In Central Java, extensive attacks on PKI members began around October 18. By the end of that month, youth groups, including many Ansor members, were conducting systematic mass killings of communists and suspected sympathizers.⁴⁶

Massacres raged over the next three months. Accurate estimates of the overall death toll are impossible, but many scholars say a nationwide figure of between 250,000 and 500,000 is reasonable.⁴⁷ A majority of those victims probably perished at the hands of Ansor members. In East Java, the site of the heaviest killings, NU youths formed the largest group in the death squads. In Central Java, nationalist groups as well as modernist Muslims played a major role, though in traditionalist areas Ansor members usually predominated.

The dynamics of this communal violence were highly complex and varied markedly from region to region.⁴⁸ A detailed analysis of these events is outside the scope of this article, but a number of patterns and generalizations regarding NU's role are possible. Violence tended to be worst in areas where the PKI's unilateral actions had been most intense. These included districts such as Kediri, Banyuwangi, Ponorogo, Klaten, Boyolali, Magelang, Jember, Blitar, and Sidoarjo. In some districts, NU members were involved in all aspects of the PKI's elimination. Together with army officers and other non-communist groups, they compiled lists of local PKI members,

⁴³ Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, p. 147; and notes from a confidential interview with an Ansor leader conducted by Harold Crouch, October 1970. See also Sundhaussen, *Road to Power*, p. 216.

⁴⁴ See: Kenneth Young, "Local and National Influences in the Violence of 1965," in *The Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, ed. Robert Cribb, p. 80; Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, p. 147; and confidential interview with a Kediri Ansor leader.

⁴⁵ Centre for Village Studies, Gadjah Mada University, "Rural Violence in Klaten and Banyuwangi," in *The Indonesian Killings of 1965–1966: Studies from Java and Bali*, ed. Robert Cribb, p. 80; and Crouch, *The Army and Politics in Indonesia*, p. 147.

⁴⁶ See Harold Crouch, "The Indonesian Army in Politics: 1960–1971" (PhD dissertation, Monash University, 1975), pp. 268–69; and Sundhaussen, *Road to Power*, pp. 215–16.

⁴⁷ For a discussion of the extent of the killings and a list of the estimated death tolls, see Cribb, ed., *The Indonesian Killings 1965–66*, p. 12.

⁴⁸ For some regional studies, see Sulistyono and Sudjatmiko. See also: Hermawan Sulistyono, *The Forgotten Years: The Missing History of Indonesia's Mass Slaughters, Jombang-Kediri 1965–1966*; and Iwan Gardono Sudjatmiko, "The Destruction of the Indonesian Communist Party: A Comparative Analysis of East Java and Bali," Ann Arbor (Michigan) Microfilms International, 1992.

participated in apprehending PKI members, sat on the “tribunals” (which decided whether the captives were to be executed), and performed the killings. In other districts, the military carried out the roundup and “trials” itself, leaving NU and other civilian groups to conduct the executions. The killings in these areas would usually be supervised by the army, which frequently also provided transport and weapons. This was particularly the case in Central Java, where a shortage of reliable non-communist units obliged the RPKAD (Resimen Parakomando Angkatan Darat, Army Para-Commando Regiment) commander, Colonel Sarwo Edhie, to train civilian groups, including Ansor, to undertake the mass executions.⁴⁹

The extent of the massacres perpetrated by NU reflects a number of factors. Most important was the prevalence of a virtual war psychology in which *santri* believed they had but two options: kill or be killed. The phrase “kill or be killed” (*membunuh atau dibunuh*) was the comment most frequently heard during interviews with NU members involved in the killings. One interviewee said, with some emotion, that “If I didn’t get rid of [*menghabisi*] them [the PKI], then I’m convinced they would have gotten rid of me, and perhaps my family and *kiai* as well. That’s what happened at Madiun.”⁵⁰ For many Muslims, the lesson of Madiun was that the Muslim community would never be safe until communism was annihilated. NU militants promoted the idea that Muslims must use the opportunity to strike first and that any hesitation or weakness would allow the advantage to shift to the communists. It made little difference that the PKI, within weeks of the coup, had been ravaged, because many NU members were convinced of communism’s inherent regenerative power. NU’s years of vilifying and dehumanizing the PKI made the task easier. Army-inspired accounts of mutilation of the murdered generals also confirmed fears about the wickedness of communists. In addition, there was constant, mostly exaggerated reporting of PKI sabotage and the discovery of PKI hideouts and weapons caches, all of which fed into this belief in an active opposition.

The killings were performed in a grimly methodical and orderly manner, usually by cutting victims’ throats with knives, *kris*, or sharp agricultural implements, such as sickles and machetes. Groups of up to several hundred condemned men could be dispatched to a given site each evening. Ansor execution squads usually waited for the approval of senior local NU leaders and the army before proceeding with each new round of killings.⁵¹

By early December 1965, the army, fearing that the killings were spiraling out of control, began measures to bring a halt to the violence. Military commanders in Central and East Java began warning Muslim leaders that further bloodshed would not be tolerated. Initially they threatened to arrest and charge with murder those

⁴⁹ Crouch, “The Indonesian Army,” pp. 268–69; and Sundhaussen, *Road to Power*, pp. 215–16. Sundhaussen suggests that the army sought to restrain the Muslim killings in East Java but lacked the ground forces to achieve this. Almost all of our interviewees, however, stressed that most of the massacres, especially during the most intensive phase in late October and early November, only proceeded after being cleared by local army leaders.

⁵⁰ Confidential interview, Gresik, October 19, 1991.

⁵¹ Confidential interviews; Young, “Local and National Influences in the Violence of 1965,” pp. 79–85; Crouch, “The Indonesian Army,” p. 270; and Pipit Rochijat, “Am I PKI or non-PKI,” *Indonesia* 40 (October 1985): 37–52.

participating in death squads. By January, however, the continuing slaughter forced military officers to declare that offenders would be shot on sight.⁵²

PBNU also tried to reduce anti-communist actions. In early January, it instructed branches to “assist all Government Officials in their efforts to create a calm environment within the community in order to hasten a political settlement.” It claimed the PKI, “after failing in the coup d’état, was now trying to lure its enemies into illegal and criminal actions.”⁵³

Most of the anti-communist violence had been halted by February.⁵⁴ Members of the NU did, however, participate in the final military-led campaign against surviving members of the PKI in South Blitar in 1968.⁵⁵

The Lasting Effects of the Violence and Changing Views of this Past within NU

The violence of this period had enduring effects on relations between NU members and the communities targeted. Some survivors of the violence who were nominal Muslims converted from Islam to Christianity.⁵⁶ Many turned to Christianity because they felt more accepted within these circles or were grateful for the welfare activities undertaken by Christian groups. Ngatiyah, for example, who is the former secretary for Gerwani’s Karang branch in Solo, recalled that, while she was in the Plantungan women’s prison, a Catholic priest visited her every day. She recalled how many people told her that Gerwani and PKI people were “satans,” and that they would not go to heaven. When she was released, she became a Catholic.⁵⁷ In a detailed study of the impact of the violence of 1965–66 on the village of Ngampel, Central Java, in a plantation area near Salatiga, Singgih Nugroho documents a mass baptism of local people in 1966.⁵⁸ They chose to become Christian because of the support of a local Christian village official and because they felt at risk in the anti-PKI purges if they did not have a religion. For some survivors, the activities of Ansor, in particular, instilled in them a fear of Islam and Islamic organizations.

The violence of 1965–66 also ushered in a new regime that frequently used military repression as a response to dissent. Anti-communism became a cornerstone of the Suharto regime and, for this reason, NU members continued to characterize their role in the killings as a form a patriotic service to the nation. NU also eulogized its role in the 1965 killings as a means of reminding the regime of a debt owed to this community. This was particularly the case after NU was increasingly marginalized by the regime beginning in the late 1960s. For example, many NU-affiliated organizations (such as its trade union, farmers’ association, and cultural institute) were either closed

⁵² Crouch, *Army and Politics*, pp. 153–54.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ See, in this issue of *Indonesia*, Vanessa Hearman, “Guerrillas, Guns, and Knives? Debating Insurgency in South Blitar, East Java, 1967–68.”

⁵⁶ Alan Thomson, “The Churches of Java in the Aftermath of the Thirtieth of September Movement,” *South East Asia Journal of Theology* 9 (1968): 7–20.

⁵⁷ “Ngatiyah (Mantan Sekretaris Gerwani) Saya Muslimah yang Taat,” *RUAS*, Edition 23 (2007): 4–5.

⁵⁸ Singgih Nugroho, *Menyintas dan Menyeberang: Perpindahan Massal Keagamaan Pasca 1965 di Pedesaan Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Syarikat, 2002).

down or absorbed into regime-sponsored bodies, NU's party was subject to increasing political restriction and intimidation by the New Order, and NU lost its last cabinet minister in 1971. NU's irritation at being sidelined was evidenced in a 1971 NU publication, which noted the organization's support for banning the PKI and also detailed the deaths of several NU "martyrs" at the hands of the PKI in Banyuwangi in October 1965.⁵⁹ Thus, in the first decade of the Suharto presidency, NU members felt a sense of betrayal and frustration.

Following NU's formal withdrawal from politics in 1984, relations improved between NU and the New Order regime. In this context, NU continued to celebrate its past service to the nation. In a 1990 commemorative history of Ansor, for example, Choirul Anam, a former Ansor member, lauds its role in crushing the communists. He celebrates the *jasa* (service) of Ansor and refers to it as "the backbone of the East Java operations." Replicating ideas current at the time of the killings, Anam also frames the participation of Ansor in religious terms, stating that "the communists were enemies of religion, they had to be wiped out [*diberantas*]."⁶⁰ Yet this claim concerning the extent to which PKI followers were the enemy of religion or opposed religious belief has been exaggerated over time by those within NU who defend NU's role in the violence. Budiawan stresses that in PKI rhetoric, the PKI never attacked religious institutions, but instead emphasized the categories of "revolutionary" or "non-revolutionary" and promoted the idea that religion should be a personal choice.⁶¹ Even when tensions between the party and the NU heightened from 1963, as the PKI began implementing the land-reform campaign, the PKI did not attack Islam *per se*, but instead targeted particular religious leaders on the basis of their class and land holdings.⁶² Writing about the tensions created by land reform, Margo Lyons observes that religious leaders resorted to religious symbols and justifications for opposing the communists, because they were unable to respond adequately to the class-based claims of the communists.⁶³ Hence, although the conflict of the early 1960s is generally remembered as one about religion, more often this conflict was fueled by concerns over economic resources and political influence.

By the mid 1990s, NU was more cautious than it had been during earlier periods of the New Order about the way it represented the violence of 1965–66. In the 1996

⁵⁹ Lembaga Pendidikan Maaruf NU, *Menangkan Pembangunan Menangkan Keadilan dan Kebenaran* (Jakarta: n.p., 1971). The Banyuwangi incident of October 18, 1965, in which Ansor members were killed in an ambush by the PKI, is documented in "Rural Violence in Klaten and Bayunwangi," a report prepared by the Centre for Village Studies at Gadjah Mada University in 1982 and published in a translated form in Cribb, *The Indonesian Killings 1965–66*, pp. 154–57. There is also a monument, called the Monumen Pancasila Jaya (Victorious Pancasila Monument) to the Ansor men who died in the village of Cemetuk, in Bayuwangi. The monument is so named to imply the patriotism of those who died. See "Puluhan Pemuda Ansor dibantai secara licik," *Duta Masyarakat*, October 3, 2001. This newspaper article claims sixty-two Ansor members died in Cemetuk.

⁶⁰ Choirul Anam, *Gerak Langkah Pemuda Ansor: Sebuah Percikan Sejarah Kelahiran* (Surabaya: Majalah Nahdlatul Ulama AULA, 1990), p. 92.

⁶¹ Budiawan, *Mematahkan Pewarisan Ingatan*, p. 111.

⁶² Such leaders were often referred to by the very derogatory label *setan desa*, or villages satans. Budiawan, pp. 123–24.

⁶³ Margo L. Lyon, "Bases of Conflict in Rural Java" (monograph, University of California–Berkeley, Center for South and Southeast Asia Studies, 1976), pp. 62–64.

publication “Banser Undertakes Jihad to Crush the PKI,”⁶⁴ Agus Sunyoto, an historian and former head of Ansor in East Java, tried to clarify Banser’s role in crushing the communists. He details close cooperation between the RPKAD instructors and Banser in Banyuwangi⁶⁵ and suggests that sub-regional military (*korem*) commanders viewed Banser as part of a wider people’s defense organization and assisted in training them as militia.⁶⁶ He notes there was also close cooperation between the district-level military commands and Banser—in particular, that those detained were given over to the district’s military, but that, in return, those army commands sent PKI prisoners to Banser to be executed.⁶⁷ Sunyoto thus emphasizes the joint participation of Banser and the military in the killings. Choirul Anam acknowledges in the preface to his book that he wrote the work partly because of military objections to accusations from the PRD (Partai Rakyat Demokratik, People’s Democratic Party)⁶⁸ that only the army was responsible for the 1965–66 killings.⁶⁹ These objections arose in the context of growing pressure on the Indonesian military due to its increasing isolation from President Suharto and a string of violent repressions that it had carried out, including its role in the 1991 Dili massacre, its participation in the 1996 crackdown on Megawati’s alternative PDI party, the PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan, Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), and its repression of the PRD. Anam confirmed that the role of Banser was considerable, but he stated that this book would, indeed, prove that this role was not independent of the ABRI command structure.

With the end of the New Order regime in May 1998, new possibilities arose for actively addressing the violence of 1965–66. Following the demise of press censorship, the media increasingly began to canvass the events of the 1965 coup attempt and the killings. Former political prisoners from 1965 also began to form research and advocacy organizations, which were either specific to the violence of 1965–66, such as YPKP 1965/1966 (Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965/1966, The Foundation for the Research into Victims of the 1965–66 Killings), or connected with broader groups of people who also considered themselves victims of the New Order regime, such as Pakorba (Paguyuban Korban Orde Baru, Association of Victims of the New Order Regime). They began to document and write about cases of human-rights abuses in 1965–66, as well as about the subsequent political imprisonment of former or alleged PKI members. In this context, views within NU about the organization’s roles in the 1965–66 killings became multifaceted and were carefully framed in anticipation of possible investigations into human-rights abuses.

As noted above, President Abdurrahman Wahid’s personal apology in 2000 to those affected by the violence and his proposal to lift the longstanding ban on communism triggered greater public discussion about NU’s role in the violence of

⁶⁴ Choirul Anam, foreword in Agus Sunyoto et al., *Banser Berjihad Menumpas PKI*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁶⁸ The PRD was a radical organization made up of student activists who, from the 1980s onwards, began to defend farmers in land-dispute cases against the Suharto regime’s development plans. They also mobilized thousands of people in labor protests. The Suharto regime branded the PRD as the new PKI and banned the party in 1997 and imprisoned many of its leaders.

⁶⁹ Anam in Sunyoto, *Banser Berjihad Menumpas PKI*, p. ii.

1965–66, thus broaching possible reconciliation regarding this past. Despite Abdurrahman's willingness to apologize for the role of NU, some senior and influential members of NU, such as Yusuf Hasyim, Abdurrahman's uncle, went to great lengths to oppose any efforts by survivor organizations to rehabilitate their names, have their civil rights restored, revise the way the PKI is represented in school history texts, and create a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to examine, inter alia, the killings of 1965–66. Commencing in 2000, Yusuf launched a campaign against making concessions to communists, arguing that Indonesia faced the threat of a PKI comeback. He wrote a letter to the Islamic newspaper *Republika* soon after Abdurrahman proposed lifting the ban on communism, explaining why NU rejects communism.⁷⁰ In 2001, Yusuf organized a photographic exhibition in Jakarta detailing the "cruelty of communists" in 1948 and 1965, and cataloging communist perfidy in other countries. The exhibition was repeated in 2003.⁷¹ Then, in 2004, he hosted a national dialogue between NU *ulama* and those who identified themselves as relatives of victims of the communists in both Madiun in 1948 and in 1965.⁷² These events were intended to stem any sympathy felt towards victims of the post-coup violence and prevent concessions being granted to them.

Yusuf Hasyim also led a delegation to meet with the speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR) to protest the omission of the 1948 and 1965 "PKI revolts" from the 2004 history curriculum.⁷³ By December 2005, the National Curriculum Standardization Board decided to return to the 1994 curriculum and include accounts of the Madiun Affair as a PKI betrayal and of the centrality of PKI's involvement in the 1965 coup attempt.⁷⁴ In addition, he headed an NU delegation to parliament that rejected the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Yusuf worked with two Surabaya-based men, Aminuddin Kasdi and Arukat Djaswadi, on both these campaigns. Aminuddin Kasdi, who has written two anti-communist books,⁷⁵ is an ex-Ansor member, while Arukat Djaswadi is a former member of PII (Pelajar Islam Indonesia, Indonesian Islamic Students' Association), an organization involved in destroying the PKI.⁷⁶ Following Yusuf's death in 2006, Aminuddin and Arukat continued their work, with military assistance and encouragement,⁷⁷ by organizing street demonstrations and lobbying parliament against any kind of concession to victims.

⁷⁰ Yusuf Hasyim, "Kenapa kita menentang komunisme?," *Republika*, April 29, 2000.

⁷¹ Yusuf Hasyim, "Komunis dan Sejarah Hitam Bangsa," *Republika*, August 7, 2003.

⁷² The dialogue was called *Dialog Ulama NU Dengan Keluarga Korban PKI '48 di Madiun and '65 di Jakarta*, hereafter "*Dialog Ulama NU*," and held on March 12, 2004, in Jakarta.

⁷³ "Pelajaran Sejarah Kembali ke Kurikulum," *Republika*, June 24, 2005.

⁷⁴ Oktamandjaya and M. Reza, "Gerakan 30 September Kembali Masuk Kurikulum Sejarah," *Tempo Interaktif*, December 1, 2005, and tempointeraktif.com, accessed March 15, 2007.

⁷⁵ See Aminuddin Kasdi, *Kaum Merah Menjarah* (Jakarta, Yogyakarta: Jendela, 2001); and, more recently, *G30S PKI/1965 Bedah Ceasar Dewan Revolusioner Indonesia* (Jakarta: Java Pustaka Media Utama, 2005).

⁷⁶ Several members of PII were allegedly attacked by members of the PKI-affiliated People's Youth (Pemuda Rakyat) in the so-called Kanigoro Affair of 1964 on the grounds that the PII was attempting to revive the then-banned Masyumi party. For the duration of the New Order regime, this "communist attack" was repeatedly publicized in military versions of the Indonesian past. See Katharine McGregor, *History in Uniform: Military Ideology and the Construction of Indonesia's Past* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007), pp. 202–3.

⁷⁷ Interview, Solahuddin Wahid, Jombang, February 27, 2008.

When he commented on the violence of 1965–66, Yusuf wavered between emphasizing the role of the army in inciting the violence and reasserting the independent role of NU. In a short account of the violence published in 2005, he notes that the local military headquarters (Koramil) in East and Central Java supplied NU with lists of Islamic figures whom the PKI had intended to target as a way of stirring up hatred.⁷⁸ He questions whether those lists originated from the PKI or from the military.

Hasyim Muzadi, the current general chairman of NU, was similarly opposed to Abdurrahman's proposed apology. Hasyim was born in Tuban, East Java, in 1949, and was sixteen years old at the time of the coup attempt. He declined to talk at length about the violence of 1965, suggesting rather defensively that "all that happened must be considered history and not opened up again, otherwise another civil war might occur."⁷⁹ Contrary to our earlier accounts about communists' reluctance to use religion as the reason for attacking their opponents, Hasyim claimed the PKI considered Islamic people the enemy and that "the party had intended to carry out a genocide." The choice of this term, "genocide," is telling given that the anti-communist killings were, indeed, comparable to the mass-scale violence associated with genocide. It is as if Hasyim is claiming victimhood for Muslims alone on the grounds that they were under threat of annihilation. Hasyim's claim mirrors those of the fervently anti-communist poet Taufik Ismail, who has written anti-communist tracts detailing killings perpetrated by communists around the world.⁸⁰ Both these claims build on the recurring rationalization that in 1965 it was a case of "kill or be killed." While this was clearly a widely held view in NU circles at the time of the killings, in retrospect it does not seem to be based on reality. There were few signs of PKI preparation for large-scale violence and little resistance from PKI members to the anti-communist pogrom. Contradicting earlier histories of NU, Hasyim also carefully stated that the military was the most influential force in the killings, particularly because of the role they played in supplying lists of PKI members.⁸¹ He said he would reject any effort to allow communism to become a legal movement again because "it would threaten religion." In an internal NU 2004 dialogue concerning "victims of the PKI" from Madiun and 1965, Hasyim expressed concerns about organizations "right down to the village level" agitating to investigate the past, arguing that this would only reopen old wounds.⁸² His reference, presumably, was to victims' groups such as YPKP 1965/1966, yet he referred to the rehabilitation of "the extreme left wing" during the reform era. Hasyim has thus expressed fears that former political prisoners might gain too much influence. His comments also reveal concerns about members of NU being prosecuted for their roles in 1965.

Muchith Muzadi, Hasyim's older brother, who is a highly respected NU elder, was also very guarded in discussing the 1965–66 killings.⁸³ Muchith was the secretary of the

⁷⁸ Yusuf Hasyim, "Killing Communists," pp. 16–17.

⁷⁹ Interview with Hasyim Muzadi, PBNU, Jakarta, May 19, 2007.

⁸⁰ Taufiq Ismail, *Katastrofi Mendunia: Marxisma, Leninisma, Stalinisma, Maoisme, Narkoba* (Jakarta: Yayasan Titik Infinitum, 2004).

⁸¹ Interview with Hasyim Muzadi, PBNU, Jakarta, May 19, 2007.

⁸² Hasyim Muzadi, *Dialog Ulama NU*.

⁸³ Interview with Kiai Muchith Muzadi, March 2, 2008, Jember.

Malang branch of Ansor from 1963–66 and secretary of the Jember branch of Ansor from 1966–68,⁸⁴ both located in East Java. He acknowledged that there were “excesses” in the repression of the PKI, but said that this level of violence was not specific or confined to this case. He also speculated that “if the PKI had succeeded with the 30 September Movement, many Indonesians would have died.”⁸⁵ This idea that the PKI would have done far worse if they had taken power was also expressed in the comments of Abdullah Faqih, who presides over Langitan *pesantren* in the small town of Tuban, northwest of Surabaya.⁸⁶ Abdullah was in charge of this *pesantren* at the time of the 1965 coup attempt, and he expressed great relief that the generals were the first target of the PKI in 1965 and not the *kiai*, otherwise, in his view, “there would have been another Madiun and perhaps more *kiai* would have been victims.” Madiun is thus a key rationalization for why *santri* had to act to stop the PKI. In our interviews, in both the 1990s and since the fall of Suharto, most interviewees portray the PKI as aggressors in 1965, focusing on the violence of the coup attempt and referring back to Madiun as an example of the threat posed by the PKI.

When Abdullah Faqih spoke of the role of Ansor in suppressing the PKI, there was a degree of heroism projected into his account reminiscent of New Order-period reports of this violence. He noted, for example, “although all religions were the enemy of the PKI, it was only Muslims or the *kiai* who were brave enough to face the PKI.”⁸⁷ He also suggested that it was NU men, Ansor members especially, who opposed the PKI most persistently.

Lesser-ranking figures within NU, who are not perhaps as wary about guarding the image of NU, have spoken far more openly about either their direct roles in the violence of 1965–66 or about the role of NU. In 2008, a number of former Banser members spoke candidly to the journalist Anthony Deutsch of the Associated Press. The Bangil preacher, Sulchan, stated that the order to eliminate all communists came through NU Islamic clerics. He recounted explicitly and with no remorse his role in killing communists, stating that the killings were justified because the communists were the enemies of his religion.⁸⁸ Mansur, the commander of two hundred Banser men in Bangil, also recounted collecting the names of communists, marking their houses in red on maps, and rounding up those individuals to be interrogated or killed.⁸⁹

Other members of NU who witnessed the violence have expressed remorse for the killings. The senior NU figure, Chalid Mawardi, who was among those who backed the repression of the PKI, recalls being shocked by the killings. When he traveled to East Java, he saw rivers full of corpses and bodies lying along the roads. In his view, people in the villages should not have been killed.⁹⁰ Some NU *kiai*, such as the Ikabepi

⁸⁴ Moch Eksan, *Kiai Kelana: Biografi Kiai Muchith Muzadi* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2000), pp. 54–55.

⁸⁵ Interview with Kiai Muchith Muzadi, March 2, 2008, Jember.

⁸⁶ Interview with Abdullah Faqih, February 27, 2008, Tuban.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Anthony Deutsch, “Indonesians Recount Role in Massacre,” *USA Today*, November 15, 2008, at www.usatoday.com/news/world/2008-11-15-2183917306x.htm, accessed December 10, 2008.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Interview, Chalid Mawardi, February 22, 2007, Jakarta.

head, Muslih, argued against the killings when the matter was discussed at senior NU levels, and he also gave sanctuary to several PKI members whom he regarded as being of “sound character.”⁹¹

In the mid-1960s, Machrus Ali was head of *Lirboyo pesantren* in Kediri. Kediri, located on the Brantas River, was a site of extensive violence, and Machrus was heavily implicated in the killings. His eldest son was more reflective about the killings and their effects. Imam Yahya recounted that on several occasions he went along with other members of the *pesantren* and army to capture members of the PKI. He recalled:

Sometimes they would take two people, sometimes five or ten people. Ansor would help arrest them and prepare a detention site. Sometimes they were held in the empty houses of PKI members who had fled. Then they were handed over to the military for “trial.” After they were arrested, those who were identified as leaders of the PKI by agreement between Ansor and the military and their data [supplied by the District Military Command] were killed. Ansor usually killed them in the jungle or quiet places.⁹²

Imam admitted to being afraid. He also recalled the fear of many local people, especially women and children whose families were PKI. “They suffered a lot and I felt pity for them.”⁹³ Although he noted that members of Ansor were very willing to take part in the violence and that they did not have to be forced, there were many who were traumatized by their roles afterwards. They went to the *kiais* to be healed.⁹⁴ This point is rarely mentioned in accounts of the violence and suggests a more enduring trauma within NU than some would admit. Hasyim Asari, an Ansor member who participated in killing PKI members in Blitar between 1967–68, for example, claimed there were no lasting effects from the violence of this period on the families of those killed, and, in fact, many joined NU.⁹⁵

In contrast to the many older NU members who share cautious views about reopening investigations into this past, some young members of Ansor who were active in the student-led reform movement of 1997–98 felt compelled to confront the stigma associated with Ansor’s past. In 1999, NU activists from eighteen towns met to discuss the effects of the 1965 tragedy on Ansor and Banser. Initially, they aimed to break down the divisions between NU members and survivors of the violence by undertaking research into NU members’ roles in the killings. Abdurrahman Wahid’s personal apology to victims of the violence of 1965 provided an important source of support for the activists’ research. The Yogyakarta branch of Ansor followed Abdurrahman’s lead and also offered an apology to victims of the 1965 violence.⁹⁶ In response to the enduring stigma associated with Ansor, Yogyakarta pledged to not

⁹¹ Interview, Muslih, May 16, 1992.

⁹² Interview, Imam Yahya, February 29, 2008, Kediri.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Interview, Hasyim Asari, Blitar, February 10, 2009.

⁹⁶ Said A. Umar, *Pernyataan GP Ansor Yogya ttg Tragedi 65*, 2000, available at www.hamline.edu/apakabar/basisdata/2000/11/29/0006.html, accessed May 22, 2007.

only investigate Ansor's role in the killings, but also to demilitarize its armed wing, which was still strongly associated with military symbols and ideology.⁹⁷

On December 10, 2000, on International Human Rights Day, NU activists from eighteen towns in Java founded the organization Syarikat (Masyarakat Santri untuk Advokasi Rakyat, Santri Society for People's Advocacy). They were driven firstly by the desire to reform the image of Ansor and NU, yet those who work for Syarikat are also motivated by compassion for survivors of the violence. Syarikat has supported former political prisoners by creating associations for women victims and by undertaking efforts to lobby members of parliament to address this past and, in particular, to end discrimination against former political prisoners and their families. Syarikat also seeks to promote truth-telling, using its publications, films, and photographic and artifact-based exhibitions to raise awareness.⁹⁸ Budiawan Purwadi stresses the emphasis within Syarikat's work of challenging the image of Muslims and communists as eternal enemies: a theme that was often repeated by those whom we interviewed. To achieve this, Syarikat has published the memoirs of two Muslim communists and also taken up the theme of Muslim-communists in its magazine *RUAS*.⁹⁹

Syarikat seeks to renew and rebuild the bonds between two groups that have been deliberately isolated from one another for almost forty years. It has gained support from some *kiai* for its work on humanitarian grounds, and, at the same time, has encountered considerable resistance from others, such as Yusuf Hasyim, who warned Syarikat not to support proposals for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Despite extensive interviews with members of NU and survivors of the violence, Syarikat has not published a comprehensive report of its research findings on NU's role in the violence. On several occasions it has, however, hinted at how it views the violence and NU's responsibility for and participation in that violence. The head of the Blitar branch of Syarikat reported, for example, that survivors of the violence and older members of NU concluded during the first Yogyakarta Ansor "goodwill gathering," held in 2002, "that the two sides had been made into enemies for the purposes of those in power."¹⁰⁰ In 2005, after several years studying NU's role in the violence, a Syarikat researcher offered a similar analysis, arguing that the violence of 1965 was vertical and not horizontal in origin, and concluding that, therefore, the violence had been state-directed.¹⁰¹ This is, of course, a more acceptable narrative for members of NU, but, as we argued above, there is evidence of widespread justification at the elite levels of NU for the violence against the PKI and members of affiliated organizations. The reason Syarikat promotes this version of NU's role is that Syarikat's primary aim is to

⁹⁷ "PW Ansor Bentuk Tim Pelurusan Sejarah 65," *Kompas*, November 21, 2000.

⁹⁸ Katharine McGregor, "Confronting the Past in Contemporary Indonesia: The Anti-communist Killings of 1965–66 and the Role of the Nahdlatul Ulama," *Critical Asian Studies* 41,2 (June 2009): 210–13.

⁹⁹ For an analysis of these efforts, see Budiawan Purwadi, *Mematahkan pewarisan ingatan: Wacana anti-komunis dan politik rekonsiliasi pasca Suharto* (Jakarta: ELSAM, 2003), pp. 145–70.

¹⁰⁰ This is according to Masrukin, from Lakpesdam NU in Blitar. Masrukin, "Mengupayakan Rekonsiliasi Lewat Dialog, Seni, and Kerja Bakti," *RUAS*, xxiv,IV (2007): 14.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Rumeckso Setyadi, Yogyakarta, May 25, 2005.

strengthen societal relations.¹⁰² We find this goal incompatible with conducting objective research into NU's role in perpetrating violence.¹⁰³

Perhaps the best indication of Ansor's current official position on the violence of 1965–66 is the version of Banser's role that is posted on the Ansor official website. The statement outlines the history of Ansor's role in this violence, noting firstly and defensively that many people in society strongly disagreed with the PKI's strategies and actions.¹⁰⁴ It then claims that many NU members died in the efforts to crush the PKI,¹⁰⁵ and also notes openly that those deaths should be attributed to the manner in which Ansor spearheaded this operation. Added to this commentary is a note from the online editor:

the violence carried out by members of Ansor need not be a source of pride for the office bearers and members of Ansor, because no matter what, this was a form of revenge against the PKI. Instead, a more humanitarian approach shown by Gus Dur [a name used for Abdurrahman Wahid] to do with 1965 could be an example for the broader membership of NU.¹⁰⁶

The editor adds a cautious qualification concerning Gus Dur's apology, noting: "Gus Dur's noble attitude does not acknowledge that the PKI was right or reflect a validation of the PKI, nor did he intend to blame other groups." Instead, the editor insists, the message was that "violence against other members of the nation based on political differences should not be repeated nor become a source of pride in the memories of members of Ansor."¹⁰⁷ This comment was made in the context of attacks on Gus Dur by Islamist groups and more conservative NU members over his support for the political rehabilitation of former leftists. In addition to his personal apology to former leftists, in 2002, for example, Abdurrahman Wahid wrote the foreword for the controversial and provocatively titled memoir *I am Proud to be the Child of a PKI Member* (*Aku Bangga Jadi Anak PKI*), written by PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia–Perjuangan, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle) parliamentarian Ribka Tjiptaning Proeltariyati.¹⁰⁸ The book prompted noisy anti-communist rallies and much criticism of Abdurrahman.¹⁰⁹ The editor's note on the Ansor website indicates, however, an effort within the younger circles of NU to reconsider the way in which this violence is remembered without discrediting Ansor.

¹⁰² Ibid., May 21, 2007.

¹⁰³ For more on this point, see McGregor, "Confronting the Past in Contemporary Indonesia," pp. 216–17.

¹⁰⁴ Sejarah Ansor, "Masa Pra dan Pasca Kemerdekaan," at www.gp-ansor.org/dinamika-pengabdian/merebut-dan-mempertahankan-kemerdekaan (text written in January 2006), last accessed May 15, 2009.

¹⁰⁵ There are not many sources on the number of Banser members who died in the violence of 1965–66 perhaps because the total numbers are not large. Some died in the lead up to the Blitar operation of 1968. As noted above (see note 38), in his book, Sunyoto claims that 155 Banser members died in Banyuwangi between October 17–22, 1965, after being deceived by members of the PKI. See Sunyoto, *Banser Berjihad Menumpas PKI*, pp. 119–24.

¹⁰⁶ See www.gp-ansor.org/dinamika-pengabdian/merebut-dan-mempertahankan-kemerdekaan, accessed May 20, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ribka Tjiptaning Proeltariyati, *Aku Bangga Jadi Anak PKI* (Jakarta: Cipta Lestari, 2002).

¹⁰⁹ Hartono Ahmad Jaiz, *Gus Dur Menjual Bapak-nya: Bantahan Pengantar Buku: Aku Bangga Jadi Anak PKI* (Jakarta: Darul Falah, 2003).

Conclusions

The memories articulated by witnesses and survivors of the 1965–66 killings continue to arouse a wide array of responses and emotions within NU, though it is possible to group these into three broad categories. The first is one of proud acknowledgement of NU's role in the physical elimination of the PKI. This is usually accompanied by religious-framed justifications that emphasize the aggressiveness of the PKI and an implacable opposition to any easing of restrictions on communism. The late Yusuf Hasyim was the best known proponent of this position. The second category is one of quiet regret at the extent of the violence, and often involves downplaying NU's involvement in the killings, while accepting that emphatic action was justified to protect the Muslim community and Indonesia from communist aggression. Hasyim Muzadi epitomizes this view. The third is that NU acted excessively, even reprehensively, in conducting mass executions of communists and that the organization should now confront and admit to its bloody past and set about rehabilitating the rights and status of victims of the 1965–66 violence. Abdurrahman Wahid is the advocate par excellence of such a stance. By far, the largest and most influential groups in NU subscribe to the first two categories, which suggests that there is little prospect of fundamental change in the organization's attitudes to the killings and of reconciliation with former communists in the medium term. In their efforts to defend or downplay the scale of violence, representatives of the two dominant positions within NU refuse to view the extra-judicial killings carried out by NU men as atrocities or gross abuses of human rights. They prefer to perpetuate the narrative of Muslim victimhood at the hands of communists, and refuse to humanize fully the hundreds of thousands of people who died.

This article has demonstrated the many different rationales, perspectives, and interpretations that NU members use to explain the killings. Martin van Bruinessen, in analyzing NU politics of the 1980s and early 1990s, wrote of how creative NU *kiai* and activists can be when molding history for a contemporary purpose.¹¹⁰ We have seen how members of the NU asserted a right to a bigger role in the Suharto regime in the early 1970s by virtue of its participation in the PKI's destruction and how NU members largely continued to celebrate their participation in the violence throughout the New Order regime as a form of service to the nation. In the post-Suharto period, representations of NU's role have become more complex, with some continuing to defend the violence, and others—such as the youth-oriented organization Syarikat—asserting that both NU and PKI members were victims of army manipulation in the 1960s and 1970s. Much as professional historians and human-rights campaigners may strive rigorously to examine past events, many in NU have little reason to do so, either out of fear that communism or communal conflict may reemerge or because it does not serve their contemporary interests.

Finally, regardless of how its members “remember” the 1965–66 killings, the weight of historical evidence indicates that NU was an active, rather than passive, participant in the slaughter of communists, and that, in many areas, *ulama* and *santri*

¹¹⁰ Martin Van Bruinessen, “Traditions for the Future,” in *Traditionalism, Modernity, and Nahdlatul Ulama*, ed. Greg Barton and Greg Fealy (Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 1995), pp. 180, 182–83.

needed little encouragement to begin violent action. NU's involvement in destroying the PKI was planned and overseen by its central leadership, particularly the militant faction led by figures such as Subchan, Yusuf Hasyim, and Munasir, but local leaders organized grassroots NU groups either to conduct the killings themselves or assist the military in doing so. NU elites undoubtedly shaped much of the anti-PKI discourse within NU, fomenting among grassroots groups a sense of lethal danger about communism. These elites saw the PKI as posing a direct threat to their privileged economic, political, and social standing. In presenting this threat to their supporters, however, they used religious terms. Thus, it is difficult to sustain the argument that NU was manipulated by the military into launching the bloodshed. Both the army under Suharto and the NU were determined to use the coup attempt to rid Indonesia of communism as a political and social force. NU's killing squads would have continued their grisly work well into 1966 had they not been discouraged by the organization's leaders, as well as forced to desist by the army. In the immediate aftermath of the killings, the dominant sentiment in NU was one of pride and, indeed, party leaders used their violent anti-communism as a source of political capital as they sought (often in vain) to extract concessions from the regime. However contemporary NU leaders choose to portray these events, the historical record is clear.